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Official Records

107th plenary meeting
Monday, 13 September 1999, 10.15 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Opertti ..... (Uruguay)

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Earthquakes in Turkey and Greece

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I should like, on behalf of the General Assembly and on my own behalf, to extend deepest sympathy to the Governments and people of Turkey and Greece on the tragic loss of lives and the extensive material damage resulting from the recent devastating earthquakes. May I also express the hope that the international community will show its solidarity in responding promptly and generously to any request for help from those countries at this time of crisis.

Agenda item 118 (*continued*)

Scale of assessments for the apportionment of the expenses of the United Nations (A/53/1040/Add.2)

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In a letter contained in document A/53/1040/Add.2, the Secretary-General informs me that, since the issuance of his communications contained in document A/53/1040/Add.1, Mongolia has made the necessary payment to reduce its arrears below the amount specified in Article 19 of the Charter.

May I take it that the General Assembly duly takes note of this information?

It was so decided.

Agenda item 31 (*continued*)

Culture of peace

Draft resolution A/53/L.79

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I give the floor to the representative of Bangladesh to introduce draft resolution A/53/L.79.

Mr. Chowdhury (Bangladesh): As the coordinator of the negotiating group of the General Assembly which met for a number of months on document A/53/L.79, I have the pleasure to introduce that document for adoption by the General Assembly. In this connection, I also draw members' attention to document A/53/1049 of 8 September 1999, which contains my letter to the President of the General Assembly on the successful conclusion of consultations on the Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace.

On 9 November 1998, upon conclusion of the general debate at the plenary level, the President of the General Assembly mandated Bangladesh to coordinate consultations for adoption of an agreed text of a declaration and programme of action on a culture of peace. Earlier, under agenda item 31 of the General Assembly, a draft declaration and programme of action was submitted by the Secretary-General in his consolidated report A/53/370 of 2 September 1998 in accordance with resolution 52/13 of 20 November 1997.

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This record contains the original text of speeches delivered in English and interpretations of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to original speeches only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned, *within one month of the date of the meeting*, to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, Room C-178. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

In fulfilment of the mandate, Bangladesh coordinated a lengthy negotiation process, which began on 2 December 1998 and finally concluded on 2 September this year. There were many difficulties, but through cooperation and support from all delegations involved, we have a consensus text. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all delegations for their active interest in and contributions to arriving at a forward-looking consensus text which will advance in a big way the promotion of a culture of peace in the next century.

Let me also mention here that many representatives of civil society showed great interest in the work we undertook. They approached me time and again to find out how the document was shaping up and were genuinely excited to learn of our progress in arriving at a consensus. I mention this because I sense great interest in this document beyond the walls of the United Nations. This will have far-reaching implications in its implementation.

The agreed text, as contained in document A/53/L.79, contains the Declaration on a Culture of Peace in part A, which highlights the ideals, norms and objectives of a culture of peace and identifies the actors involved in its furtherance. The Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace in part B identifies the major areas of action to promote and strengthen a culture of peace. The areas identified are education, sustainable economic and social development, human rights, equality between women and men, democratic participation, advancing understanding, tolerance and solidarity, participatory communications and free flow of information, and knowledge and international peace and security. Under each of these major areas, the Programme of Action identifies specific actions that will foster a culture of peace.

I believe that this document is unique in more than one way. It is a universal document in the real sense, transcending boundaries, cultures, societies and nations. Unlike many other General Assembly documents, this document is action-oriented and encourages actions at all levels, be they at the level of the individual, the community, the nation or the region, or at the global and international levels. The document also brings together the various actors who have a role in advancing a culture of peace. They include States, international organizations, civil society, community leaders, parents, teachers, artists, professors, journalists, humanitarian workers — in a way, all people from all walks of life and all sorts of backgrounds can contribute to its implementation.

For an international forum like the General Assembly, this document really goes ahead in terms of bringing in various subjects that the Assembly has rarely touched in its 50 years of existence.

I would be remiss if I did not mention the significant role which the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has played in highlighting the cause of culture of peace. Director-General Federico Mayor has been a great champion and this document owes a lot to his direct and persistent efforts to make a culture of peace a global charter universally accepted and supported.

I would like to mention here some editorial changes that appear in A/53/L.79 from the text we adopted at the informal consultations on 2 September. These are as follows:

Paragraph 10 (j) of the Programme of Action now reads as follows:

> "Removing obstacles to the realization of the right of peoples to self-determination, in particular of peoples living under colonial or other forms of alien domination or foreign occupation, which adversely affects their social and economic development."

In paragraph 11 (g), the word "for" in the first line should be replaced by the word "to".

The first clause of paragraph 16 (i) now reads:

> "Recommends to give proper consideration to the issue of humanitarian impact of sanctions".

These are the editorial changes that have been made. I think that, through these changes, the editors have tried to make a good English text. But, as members know, in this house we are working for a good consensus, not for good English.

I believe that we should adopt by consensus document A/53/L.79, as amended orally by me. By adopting this document, the General Assembly at its fifty-third session will leave it as its legacy that will endure for generations.

Mr. Niehaus (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): I am very pleased to address the General Assembly on behalf of the States members of the Central American group —

the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama and Costa Rica — on agenda item 31, entitled "Culture of peace", to which we attach the greatest importance.

At the outset, allow me to convey our warmest congratulations to you, Sir, on your outstanding and valuable leadership as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-third session. We wish you continued success in the service of the people and Government of the sister Republic of Uruguay.

Allow me also to express the pleasure of the States members of the Central American group at the imminent adoption, at this fifty-third session of the General Assembly, of the Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace. This adoption will bring to a successful close the arduous work and efforts undertaken in accordance with the mandate contained in resolution 52/13.

Here, we pay tribute to Ambassador Anwarul Karim Chowdhury, Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to the United Nations, for his dedicated and effective coordination of the negotiation of these texts and for introducing them to the Assembly. We wish also to convey our appreciation to the Secretary-General, who, in coordination with the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), has submitted the report before the Assembly containing a draft declaration and programme of action on a culture of peace. We wish further to thank all our counterparts in the negotiations for their valuable contributions.

The cornerstone of the draft declaration is the statement that

> "'since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed'". [A/53/L.79, part A]

That philosophy is the ideological basis of the very concept of a culture of peace; it is not a new statement, but is drawn from the constitution of UNESCO. Hence, the delegations I represent believe that UNESCO can and must continue to play a central role in the promotion of a culture of peace.

History proves the predominance of a culture of war. For century, people have used weapons to resolve their conflicts, both between States and within their own communities. Violence reigns in human relations, and there is no sign that this is on the wane. Events of recent months are testimony to this unfortunate dominance.

But we must recognize that the establishment 50 years ago of the United Nations and of the organizations linked with it was an act of faith in the goodwill of human beings and a reflection of a profound hope in our capacity and determination to live in peace. The creation of the United Nations was a categorical declaration of universally shared values and purposes aimed at and committed to transforming the reigning culture of war into a culture of peace and non-violence. Achievements of the past 50 years have shown that, with the firm desire to do so, it is indeed possible to replace a culture of war by a culture of peace.

Today, with the cold war nothing more than a footnote in the history books, and when we can tell our grandchildren of it as though telling of a bad dream, there are new conditions for the construction of a true culture of peace. All of us, States and individuals alike, have the moral obligation to take advantage of these circumstances to shape a culture of peace through education and, in particular, through human-rights training.

It is undeniable that human rights have a central place in a culture of peace. When those rights are not respected, when human dignity is violated, and when human beings are dehumanized, it is impossible to hope that peace will exist. Respect for and promotion of human dignity, and the quest for the common good are indispensable for the existence of peace. Hence, we cannot fail to state our concern that, 50 years after the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, much still remains to be done to guarantee the enjoyment of the inalienable rights of all human beings: women, men, children, young people, older people, the aged, the disabled and members of ethnic, religious, educational, linguistic or social minorities alike.

We know that a culture of peace will not come about this year or next; we are realistic. But we hope that the adoption and dissemination of the draft declaration and programme of action on a culture of peace will broadly promote the philosophy and lofty purposes of a culture of peace. Here, we feel we should take maximal advantage of the fact that the year 2000 has been proclaimed the International Year for the Culture of Peace, and that the period 2001-2010 has been declared the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World. The latter is

especially critical for the international community, and demands a great effort by the United Nations, as set out in the valuable reports of Ms. Graça Machel and of Ambassador Olara Otunnu. We consider that, for young people and for civil society in general, the media, non-governmental organizations, universities and secondary schools must play a central role in creating this culture of peace, through their ability to teach and to disseminate. Here too, we believe that the promotion and dissemination of a culture of peace should play an important role in the Millennium Assembly to be held next year.

Let me highlight one of the actions to promote international peace and security set out in paragraph 16 of the draft programme of action, the one relating to the ability to learn valuable lessons conducive to a culture of peace from "military conversion" efforts as evidenced in some countries of the world. That indeed is our experience in Central America. The situation in El Salvador is proof of the positive effects of that country's experiences in this sphere. My own country, Costa Rica, began its military conversion experiment in 1948, when it abolished the army and devoted its resources to improving the quality of life of its people, to education and to health. This experiment has borne fruit, and today we are proud of a literacy rate of 94.5 per cent, and of excellent health conditions. We sincerely desire that all nations should earmark their resources for meeting the basic needs of their peoples rather than using them on unnecessary military expenditures. We sincerely hope that all peoples will be able fully to enjoy their inalienable rights and that they will benefit from the transformation of the culture of war into a culture of peace.

Let me recall in conclusion that tomorrow, on the first day of the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly, we will mark the International Day of Peace, proclaimed in resolution 36/67 of 30 November 1981. That day is dedicated to commemorating and strengthening the ideals of peace in every nation and within every people, and among nations and peoples. The proclamation of this Day was proposed by Costa Rica, with the generous support of all the countries of Central America and Latin America, and it was adopted by the General Assembly by consensus. Let me quote the then Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Javier Pérez de Cuéllar:

> "The celebration of this International Day of Peace reflects not only the age-old aspiration for a world without war, but also the present-day awareness that we live in a situation of unprecedented danger. From this awareness will undoubtedly come the wisdom and determination to face responsibly the sources of conflicts and mistrust in accordance with the principles of the Charter. It is time that the international community responded to the challenge posed by this day dedicated to peace."

Ms. Korpi (Finland): On behalf of the European Union, it is a pleasure for me to say a few words of appreciation on this very important day.

Let me first thank you, Sir, on behalf of the European Union, for your excellent and outstanding presidency during the fifty-third session of the General Assembly. Today we will adopt a Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace. Tomorrow the General Assembly will reconvene to open its fifty-fourth session, the session which will guide us into the "International Year for the Culture of Peace". Coincidentally, this year is also the year which in our calendar marks the turn of the millennium. This Declaration and Programme of Action could be considered one of the milestones in promoting a culture of peace.

The European Union has participated closely in the consultations on the draft Declaration and Programme of Action. We would like to commend the Chairman of these consultations, Ambassador Anwarul Karim Chowdhury of Bangladesh, for his commitment to the process and for his tireless efforts to arrive at a good result. We would also like to pay special tribute to Ambassador Emilia Castro de Barish of Costa Rica, who from the beginning of the consultations to this very day supported our work with admirable devotion and determination, fully commensurate with the extraordinary role that her country has played in its region for the promotion of a culture of peace. We also would like to express our sincere appreciation to the many delegations from all parts of the world that, like the European Union, committed themselves to work together with the Chairman to polish the draft, which now enjoys the support of the whole United Nations membership.

As we can conclude from the content of the document that we are about to adopt, the history of the United Nations itself is the history of the promotion of a culture of peace. The very foundation of the Organization, more than half a century ago, was indeed a major milestone in this endeavour. As a first priority after the scourge of the Second World War, the United Nations undertook to codify and encourage respect for the universally recognized human rights and fundamental

freedoms inherent in humankind. The role that the United Nations has played in promoting a culture of peace through the pursuit of justice, tolerance, solidarity and pluralism at all levels can hardly be overestimated. The educative role of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in this endeavour has been crucial. Its post-war Constitution proclaims

> "That since war begins in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed".

We pay special homage to the tireless determination of UNESCO to promote human rights education.

Peace, justice, human rights, development and democracy are all interdependent and interrelated. This Declaration and Programme of Action is a strong pronouncement of all Member States in favour of a holistic view of the vocation of the United Nations. Peace cannot be pursued in isolation from justice, and development cannot be induced in the absence of democracy. A key to progress in all these fields, and thereby a key to the fuller development of a culture of peace, is the recognition that the human person is ultimately the central subject and principal beneficiary of all the purposes of the United Nations. Therefore United Nations policies and programmes systemwide should be human-centred and should be guided by, and based on, the promotion of full respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Mr. Alemán (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): Since this is the last day of the fifty-third session of the General Assembly, permit me, on behalf of the Government and people of Ecuador and on my own behalf, to extend to you, Mr. President, our deep gratitude for the work you have done over the last 12 months. Undoubtedly your contribution to the Organization will be remembered by generations to come.

Many of the elements of my statement, including expressions of gratitude to those who worked so hard to bring about the adoption of the Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace — particularly those conveyed to the Ambassador of Bangladesh — have already been expressed. Nevertheless, I should like, on behalf of the Government of Ecuador, to make the following comments.

In 1998, when Mr. Federico Mayor, at the request of the General Assembly, submitted his proposed Declaration and Programme of Action, the Government of Ecuador publicly supported the contents of the text under consideration by the States and expressed its readiness to support it without amendment. Nevertheless, loyal to its principles of respect and solidarity, it agreed that the draft should be changed as many times as necessary in order to bring about consensus.

From the time of the original proposal to the Declaration being adopted today, much water, as we say in my country, has flowed under the bridge, bringing with it ideas that have been deemed very valuable by the Government and people of Ecuador.

We trust that one day soon, the Assembly will give serious thought to the human right to peace; that the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders will not give rise to concern on the part of any delegation; that a systematic investigation will be undertaken of the factors relating to differences between men and women that impede or promote the development of a culture of peace; and that, in the same way we are discussing this, we will be able to discuss openly any subject that may arise.

The time has passed when we could speak conditionally. All documents can be improved, including this one, whose importance is clear. We have adopted a Programme calling for hands-on action. Let us make a reality of the constitutional principle of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), which states that

> "since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed."

More than 30 years ago, the former Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ecuador, Mr. Luis Bossano, said:

> "What we must do ultimately is to carry out a direct and frontal assault — if I may use the expression — on the conscience, at the deepest level, of all social groups. We must take a doctrine of peace and make of it a specific discipline accompanied by a carefully prepared programme, in order to develop, with logical rigour and an adequate foundation, an entire body of principles and pronouncements of a scientific, ethical and pragmatic nature in the service of the categorical human imperative for peace".

Today that doctrine of "the disarmament of consciences" is known as "Towards a culture of peace". The name may have changed, but the ideal is the same. Let us move forward in the search for the new human being — peace-loving and tolerant in a spirit of solidarity that springs from conviction.

Mr. Franco (Colombia) *(spoke in Spanish)*: This is the appropriate opportunity to extend to you, Mr. President, our warmest congratulations and thanks for your leadership of this session of the General Assembly, which is coming to a close. The quality of your leadership and the transparency of your work will be a reference point for the future work of the General Assembly.

On behalf of the Government of Colombia, I wish to recognize the joint work carried out by the Secretary-General and the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to present to the General Assembly today, at this final meeting of the current session, the draft Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace. I would also like to recognize the efforts and dedication of the Permanent Representative of Bangladesh, Ambassador Chowdhury, and his colleagues at the Mission, as well as those from other missions who followed the negotiations over several months.

Colombia welcomes the conclusion of one stage of work on the theme of peace. We have before us a Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace, the implementation of which should be undertaken with firmness by the international community, particularly the United Nations. This must be a basic tool so that the system can carry out its fundamental task of saving future generations from the scourge of war. In addition, we envision the year 2000 as the "International Year for the Culture of Peace", and the next decade as the "International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World".

In an international system stricken with conflicts, where wars arise on such a persistent basis, we must accept that we need a change. We must move from the culture of war with which we have been afflicted to the culture of peace which we so much desire. We all know that the homogeneity of cultures is a myth, but we can learn to seek similarities instead of differences. There may be hundreds of differences between us human beings, but we have thousands of things in common, and those are the things we should identify in order to come closer to one another.

The responsibility of UNESCO is clear. Education is the fundamental pillar of a culture of peace and the school is the basic vehicle for education and early socialization of children and adolescents, the transmitter of cultural elements and a reflection, laboratory and shaper of reality that must be an essential instrument for implementing the Programme of Action.

If we look at the future, it is the children whom we must make the principal actors of a culture of peace in the new world order. They, on their own initiative and as victims of war, have already begun to work and have made important achievements. In my country, for example, the Colombia Movement of Children for Peace carried out work that last year led to nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize.

The emphasis that this document places on non-violence and on the prevention of violent conflicts should reflect the commitment of the international community to respecting human rights, ending the arms race and respecting sovereignty and the self-determination of peoples.

We have a valuable document before us that is without doubt a step forward for this community of nations. It involves emphasizing the prevention of violence as the sure way of solving future conflicts. If this document leads us to reflect on peace and on the need to build a culture that will sustain and strengthen that peace and make it viable, then it will have already achieved a very important objective. If the issue of peace becomes an obsession for the community of nations, we will have taken a major step forward.

Mr. Londono (United States): Permit me to join other delegations in extending to you, Mr. President, our most sincere appreciation for your leadership and efforts during your presidency.

The United States joins the consensus adoption of the draft Declaration on a Culture of Peace and its Programme of Action and wishes to commend its authors for their efforts to conceptualize and to promote this ideal to which we strive. We particularly want to express our thanks to Ambassador Chowdhury, the Permanent Representative of Bangladesh, for his efforts to bring this document to the light of day.

We find that the concept of the culture of peace was most clearly stated by Director-General Mayor of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural

Organization (UNESCO) when he stated that a culture of peace consisted of a set of values, attitudes and behaviours that inspired social interaction based on the principles of freedom, justice, democracy, tolerance and solidarity.

Permit me to state our understanding of a few specific passages in the document. We interpret references to the right to development in article 1 of the Declaration and in paragraph 11 of the Programme of Action to be consistent with our view that the right to development is focused on the individual and that it is up to national Governments to create conditions conducive to the progressive realization of economic development. The right to development is not a collective right of groups or States and it is not a legal entitlement to a set of standards of living or a transfer of resources.

We do not interpret the reference to combating violence in the media in paragraph 15 of the Programme of Action as in any way intending to restrict press reporting of the kinds of violent actions we have seen in Bosnia, Kosovo, Rwanda, Burundi and elsewhere in recent years. In fact, we would have liked to have seen in paragraph 15 of the Programme of Action UNESCO's enshrined language on free press, namely, that "an independent, pluralistic and free press is essential to the development and maintenance of democracy in a nation and for economic development".

Finally, we understand the reference to priorities established by the United Nations in the field of disarmament in paragraph 16 of the Programme of Action to mean priorities that were adopted by consensus.

Mr. García González: (El Salvador) *(spoke in Spanish)*: My delegation shares and supports the views expressed by Ambassador Bernd Niehaus, the Permanent Representative of Costa Rica, on behalf of the Central American countries on the occasion of the adoption by the General Assembly of the draft Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace.

We would also like to repeat our gratitude to Ambassador Anwarul Chowdhury, the Permanent Representative of Bangladesh, for his ..raordinary diplomatic effort, which has enabled us to arrive at an important text that will, arguably, help us to build a culture of peace in the next millennium.

I shall refer to just one aspect which the Government of El Salvador believes it important to emphasize. Unfortunately, it has not been reflected in the final text of the Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace, but because of its intrinsic value it can be considered to be one of the subjects on which the international community should take a stand in the near future. I am referring to resolution 39/11 of 12 November 1984. In the annex to that resolution, the General Assembly stated that "the peoples of our planet have a sacred right to peace" and that "the preservation of the right of peoples to peace and the promotion of its implementation constitute a fundamental obligation of each State".

If individual liberties have been recognized as first-generation human rights and have not been subject to any major criticism, the second- and third-generation rights, which are known as the rights of solidarity, have given rise to controversy among various international players, and even among jurists, because from an international standpoint the post-cold-war scenario has changed substantially and consequently there has been a change in the nature of conflicts. Ideological confrontation has given way to new manifestations of violence which are contributing to an increase in poverty, exclusion and ignorance. As these conflicts are of a different nature, we must look for solutions that are adapted to a new world dynamic. On the one hand, there is the application of the collective social and economic rights of mankind and, on the other, the rights to peace, the environment, development and the common heritage of mankind. These rights are found at the intersection of the individual, the people, the State and of humanity, enriching international law while at the same time making it more complicated. They should not, however, prevent us from moving forward in innovative ways, as they show clearly that the problems of peace call for solutions that are both local and global, individual and universal. In the context of this controversy relating to the supposed hierarchy of rights, the General Assembly, in subparagraph (a) of paragraph 1 of resolution 32/130, stated:

> "All human rights and fundamental freedoms are indivisible and interdependent; equal attention and urgent consideration should be given to the implementation, promotion and protection of both civil and political, and economic, social and cultural rights".

This same spirit was taken up by the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna in 1993 and was given form in the Declaration and Programme of Action, which bears out El Salvador's argument that the right to peace, a healthy environment and development cannot be relegated to a lower rank.

In conclusion, I should like to reiterate the fact that the Government of El Salvador believes that building a culture of peace would make it possible to adopt a common system of fundamental and universal values of peace, non-violence and tolerance through the resolution of differences and conflicts; to use dialogue, negotiation and mediation or arbitration by third parties; to recognize cultural diversity, plurality and participation; and also to recognize the right to be different, establish an intercultural dialogue and ensure the application of the cultural rights of people belonging to minorities and of indigenous peoples, thereby contributing to the elimination of potential sources of conflict resulting from discrimination and the violation of those rights.

To sum up, the Government of El Salvador agrees that education for a culture of peace must take into account a broad and polysemic understanding of peace, because we must build it at various levels simultaneously: within society, at the domestic level among individuals and different groups, and at the international level among States and nations.

Mr. Rodríguez Parrilla (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): We are pleased that today we will be adopting the Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace — texts which have been arrived at after a long and complicated process of negotiation. Ever since the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, and in particular its Director-General, Mr. Federico Mayor, originated the proposal, we have been closely following its evolution. My delegation would like to take advantage of this solemn occasion to express its gratitude to Mr. Mayor for his hard work and determination to involve the whole of the United Nations system in the discussion and debate on this draft from a broad and all-embracing perspective. We should also like to thank in particular Ambassador Chowdhury for his tireless efforts.

According to Thomas Mann, man is above all himself and his circumstances. The causes of the ills that we want to eradicate lie, essentially, in the inequality and injustice prevailing in the world, in the growing and abysmal differences between the rich and the poor, in social injustice and in the inequality among nations. The documents that we will adopt will act as an important guide and point of reference for action, especially if we create a socio-economic foundation to guarantee that children, men and women are able to gain equal access to science, to enjoy everything that is fine and beautiful — the heritage of mankind — and to develop their intellect.

On the eve of the new millennium, the world seems to be characterized by neo-liberal globalization, and it is also marked by the globalization of social inequity. There must not be a globalization of unemployment or of injustice leading to cuts in social programmes and leaving a growing number of people without protection. We must work to ensure that globalization means fraternity and cooperation among all peoples, sustainable development, the fair distribution and rational use of the abundant material and spiritual wealth that humankind is capable of creating. That is an indispensable condition for the common heritage of humanity that can and must survive. Otherwise, talking about a culture of peace would be inconceivable.

How would it be possible to talk in philosophical or practical terms about a culture of peace in a world in which the number of poor is growing and their poverty increasing and in which more than 1.3 billion human beings live in absolute poverty while the 225 richest people possess a fortune equal to the annual income of 47 per cent of the world's population? Some 800 million are suffering from hunger, and 95 per cent of all cases of AIDS occur in the South? How can we agree today to talk about the 1.45 billion illiterate adults, the 110 million children who do not attend primary school and the 275 million older children who do not receive secondary education? How can we talk about a culture of peace while 12 million children under five years of age die of curable diseases every year and 200 million children younger than five years of age are suffering from malnutrition?

Peace is much more than the absence of war. There can be no peace without social and economic development and vice versa. Peace involves the commitment to renounce force or the use of force in international relations, entailing observance of the United Nations Charter, respect for the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-intervention in internal affairs, and respect for peoples's right to self-determination. Peace also means resistance to all manifestations of neocolonialism, racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, terrorism and violations of all human rights, wherever they may occur.

We cannot think of peace when, under the diktat of a great Power, attempts are made to impose unilateral laws and measures of an extraterritorial nature, designed to subjugate independent nations and peoples by force and coercion. We are therefore pleased that many of these

principles have been embodied in the document we are to adopt today.

My delegation reiterates today its commitment to continuing to work for a genuine culture of peace that is based in a world of equity and justice, in which the right to development will no longer be a mere mirage and the human right to life and peace will be fully exercised.

Mr. Zmeevski (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Allow me to open my statement with words of gratitude to you, Sir, for your leadership of our work to reach a consensus on the Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace, as well as of the work of the General Assembly at its fifty-third session, which is closing today.

The General Assembly's adoption today of the Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace has been a kind of prelude to the International Year for the Culture of Peace and the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World.

However, the significance of these documents goes far beyond the framework of those measures. The fundamental principles of the United Nations Charter laid down in the Declaration and the complex concrete measures set out in the Programme of Action open broad prospects for the building, in the third millennium, of a culture of peace that must replace the culture of force and save succeeding generations from the scourge of war.

It is very important that, in the Declaration and Programme of Action, it is precisely the United Nations system that is given a leading role in affirming the culture of peace. This is weighty proof of the central role of our Organization as a unique mechanism for maintaining international peace and security, a universal forum for the development of multilateral cooperation and the practical embodiment of the concept of the multipolar nature of the modern world.

Russia's commitment to the ideals of the Declaration and Programme of Action, manifested by our active participation in the preparation of these documents and reflected in their provisions, prompts us to consider genuine ways of ensuring peace, security, stability and prosperity and of defending human dignity in the next century. It is no accident that many provisions of the Declaration and Programme of Action are in harmony with the concept of the twenty-first century world, the formulation of which began with an initiative of the President of the Russian Federation in June this year.

We are grateful to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the initiator of this fruitful and topical theme, and to all delegations that participated in drafting the Declaration and Programme of Action for their thoughtful approach, flexibility, wisdom, spirit of cooperation and tremendous desire to achieve the final result.

We particularly wish to convey our gratitude to the Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to the United Nations, Ambassador Chowdhury, who assumed the difficult task of coordinating the consultations, for his major contribution to the production of the Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace.

With the Assembly's adoption of the Declaration and Programme of Action, their provisions will become the heritage of the entire world community, providing clear guidelines for educating people in a spirit of peace, non-violence and creativity. We are convinced that the documents to be adopted today will strengthen the foundation of the building of peace and international legality to the benefit of future generations.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): We shall now proceed to consider draft resolution A/53/L.79.

The Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolution A/53/L.79, entitled "Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace" and which has two parts. Part A is entitled "Declaration on a Culture of Peace" and part B is entitled "Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace".

May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt draft resolution A/53/L.79?

Draft resolution A/53/L.79 was adopted (resolution 53/243).

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): Before concluding this item, I should like to thank Ambassador Anwarul Karim Chowdhury of Bangladesh for undertaking the necessary consultations on the Declaration and enabling us to arrive at a consensus.

May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to conclude its consideration of agenda item 31?

It was so decided.

Agenda item 59 (*continued*)

Question of equitable representation on and increase in the membership of the Security Council and related matters

Report of the Open-ended Working Group on the Question of Equitable Representation on and Increase in the Membership of the Security Council and Other Matters related to the Security Council (A/53/47)

Draft decision (A/53/47, para. 28)

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In light of the fact that we held intensive discussions in the Open-ended Working Group, I would hope that we can adopt the draft decision recommended for adoption by the Working Group without any further discussion.

We shall now proceed to consider the draft decision contained in paragraph 28 of the report of the Open-ended Working Group (A/53/47).

The Assembly will now take a decision on the draft decision contained in paragraph 28 of the report of the Open-ended Working Group on the Question of Equitable Representation on and Increase in the Membership of the Security Council and Other Matters related to the Security Council.

May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt the draft decision?

The draft decision was adopted.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I should now like to express sincere thanks to Ambassador Hans Dahlgren of Sweden and Ambassador John de Saram of Sri Lanka, the two Vice-Chairmen of the Open-ended Working Group, who have undertaken the challenging task of conducting the discussions and complex negotiations of the Working Group. I am sure members of the Assembly join me in extending to them our appreciation.

May I take it that it is the wish of the Assembly to conclude its consideration of agenda item 59?

It was so decided.

Agenda item 167 (*continued*)

Armed aggression against the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Note verbale (A/53/1048)

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): Members will recall that, at its 96th plenary meeting on 24 March 1999, the General Assembly concluded the debate on this item.

In connection with this item, I should like to draw the attention of members to document A/53/1048, which contains a note verbale dated 7 September 1999 from the Permanent Mission of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in which it is requested that item 167 be included in the agenda of the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly.

May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to defer consideration of this item and to include it in the draft agenda of the fifty-fourth session?

It was so decided.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In the note verbale contained in document A/53/1048, the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo indicated that it would like this item to be considered directly in plenary meeting. This information will be conveyed to the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session.

This concludes our consideration of agenda item 167.

Agenda item 17 (*continued*)

Appointments to fill vacancies in subsidiary organs and other appointments

(j) Appointment of the Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services

Note by the Secretary-General

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I have been informed that, in the light on ongoing consultations, consideration of this sub-item should be deferred to the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly.

May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to defer consideration of this sub-item and to include it in the draft agenda of the fifty-fourth session?

It was so decided.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): This concludes our consideration of sub-item (j) of agenda item 17 and of agenda item 17 as a whole.

Agenda item 57

Question of the Comorian island of Mayotte

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): It is my understanding that, after the necessary consultations, consideration of this item may be deferred to the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly.

May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to defer consideration of this item and to include it in the provisional agenda of the fifty-fourth session?

It was so decided.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): This concludes our consideration of agenda item 57.

Agenda item 60 *(continued)*

Revitalization of the work of the General Assembly

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): Members will recall that, at its 70th plenary meeting on 25 November 1998, the Assembly held a debate on this item.

It is my understanding that it would be desirable to defer consideration of this item to the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly. May I take it, then, that it is the wish of the Assembly to defer consideration of this item and to include it in the draft agenda of the fifty-fourth session?

It was so decided.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): This concludes our consideration of agenda item 60.

Agenda item 61

Restructuring and revitalization of the United Nations in the economic, social and related fields

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): Members will recall that, on 15 September 1998, the Assembly decided to include this item in the agenda of the present session.

It is my understanding that it would be desirable to defer consideration of this item to the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly. May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to defer consideration of this item and to include it in the draft agenda of the fifty-fourth session?

It was so decided.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): This concludes our consideration of agenda item 61.

Agenda item 62

Question of Cyprus

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): Members may recall that, on 15 September 1998, the Assembly decided to include this item in the agenda of the present session but deferred a decision on the allocation of the item to an appropriate time during the session.

It is my understanding that it would be desirable to defer consideration of this item to the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly. May I take it, then, that it is the wish of the Assembly to defer consideration of this item and to include it in the draft agenda of the fifty-fourth session?

It was so decided.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): This concludes our consideration of agenda item 62.

Agenda item 115

Improving the financial situation of the United Nations

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): Members may recall that, on 15 September 1998, the Assembly decided to include this item in the agenda of the present session.

It is my understanding that it would be desirable to defer consideration of this item to the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly. May I take it, then, that it is the wish of the Assembly to defer consideration of this item and to include it in the draft agenda of the fifty-fourth session?

It was so decided.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): This concludes our consideration of agenda item 115.

Agenda item 129

Financing of the United Nations Operation in Mozambique

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): Members will recall that, on 15 September 1998, the Assembly decided to include this item in the agenda of the present session.

It is my understanding that it would be desirable to defer consideration of this item to the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly. May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to defer consideration of this item and to include it in the draft agenda of the fifty-fourth session?

It was so decided.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): This concludes our consideration of agenda item 129.

Agenda item 144

Report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the Office of Internal Oversight Services

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): Members may recall that, on 15 September 1998, the Assembly decided to include this item in the agenda of the present session.

It is my understanding that it would be desirable to defer consideration of this item to the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly. May I take it, then, that it is the wish of the Assembly to defer consideration of this item and to include it in the draft agenda of the fifty-fourth session?

It was so decided.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): This concludes our consideration of agenda item 144.

Agenda items that remain for consideration during the fifty-third session of the General Assembly

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I should like to remind delegations that the following agenda items, on which action has been taken at previous meetings, have remained open for consideration during the fifty-third session: items 10 to 12, 20, 30, 37 to 40, 43 to 45, 47, 58, 93 and 94, 108, 110 to 114, 117 to 128, 130 to 143, 145, 152, 155, 161, 163, 165 and 170.

As members are aware, these items, with the exception of item 47, entitled "Election of the judges of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Prosecution of Persons Responsible for Genocide and Other Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law Committed in the Territory of Rwanda and Rwandan Citizens Responsible for Genocide and Other Such Violations Committed in the Territory of Neighbouring States between 1 January and 31 December 1994" and item 121, entitled "United Nations pension system", have been included in the provisional agenda of the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly.

May I take it that the Assembly considers that discussion of these items at the present session is concluded?

It was so decided.

Closing address by the President

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I see the session of the General Assembly that is closing today, the penultimate session of this century, as a preparatory exercise in meeting the problems awaiting us with the arrival of the new century — in other words, problems that are already here. It is a century that, on the one hand, shows both promising and disturbing signs and appears to be marked by the existence of serious contradictions that, in turn, are the major challenges to which mankind must continue to respond. In our view, those contradictions take primarily three aspects.

First, the world continues to move towards the most complete achievement of individual freedoms and towards the democratization of national societies and the international community. Despite the fact that much remains to be done, it is true that never before in history

have the ideals of democracy and freedom achieved such broad application, or at least recognition, as they have now. However, the progress made in this field has not done away with violence aimed at imposing the ideals and purposes of heightened nationalism, religious fundamentalism or supposed ethnic supremacy. The fact that in the past ten years only a half dozen of the more than 100 conflicts that have affected international peace and security were territorial conflicts clearly shows the kind of problem we will be facing in the future.

During the 12 months since the Assembly began its fifty-third session, violence in vast regions of the world has dominated and affected people's lives, in many cases depriving them of life and hence generating a legacy of fear and, in many cases, rancour in the hearts of human beings. These events categorically disprove the prophecies of those who have predicted the end of history.

In Europe, Africa and Asia old and new conflicts continue to call for the attention of the international community and increasingly cry out for the adoption of attitudes and signs of solidarity inspired by tolerance. Naturally, the world is not a homogeneous place. There are regions where peace prevails and where there is agreement and where peaceful settlement of controversies takes place. Clear proof of this has been offered by our region — Latin America and the Caribbean — where certain historical conflicts among States were brought to a peaceful end in the course of this year. I cite this fact with undisguised pride, while at the same time not failing to note clearly our brotherly worry over the internal situation that prevails in some of those States.

The African continent has been particularly affected by various factors, some due to nature and others to the activities of man. The General Assembly has given particular attention to this situation. Proof of this was the adoption by consensus of a resolution on the causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa, which set out the main principles for providing assistance to the continent. The General Assembly must persist in its efforts to assist our African brothers to overcome this situation of crisis and underdevelopment in which they have been placed as a result of a history of colonialism and discrimination.

The prevailing political conditions in the Middle East during the session ending today were not the most propitious for advancing the peace process. The General Assembly dealt with the various aspects of this complex problem in the hopes that the situation would develop along more favourable lines. Fortunately, this appears to be the situation today. I therefore trust that during the coming session the Assembly will be able to adopt significant decisions that will contribute to consolidating a lasting and just peace in the region.

But it has undoubtedly been the conflict in Kosovo — because of its magnitude and consequences — that has been the most important international political event of the year. Allow me here to express some of my personal views.

I see it as a lamentable coincidence that during the year I was chosen to preside over the General Assembly the credibility and efficacy of this body, which is the most genuinely democratic and representative body of the international community, has been subjected by that conflict to the harshest test in its history.

The conflict in Kosovo brought to light several aspects that I cannot fail to mention. First, it showed that the Security Council, whose commitment is to the preservation of peace, has been kept from pursuing that commitment by virtue of the fact that it was not able to agree on decisions in this matter. The possibility of using the veto played its role, showing that this mechanism supposedly conceived to, among other things, avoid the use of force, has ultimately led to its being an enabling factor in removing the use of force from the Council and, hence, from the entire Organization.

Secondly, it is necessary to recall that the General Assembly, which, under the Charter, in particular Articles 10 and 11, is competent to deal with the maintenance of international peace and security, has not been in a position to exercise that competence — not because of a lack of a legal framework but because the predominant political will was that it should not make use of that capacity. In the past that responsibility was assumed by this body when the Security Council was kept from acting in situations that threatened or breached peace. On those occasions, the international community formally declared that the inability of the Security Council to discharge its functions did not deprive the General Assembly of its rights or relieve it of its responsibilities under the Charter. Finally, let us recall that the Charter is based on the principle of legitimacy, which provides a basis and *raison d'etre* for the entire international legal order. As a result, the most important lesson we must learn from the case of Kosovo is that we should continue diligently to seek ways to fully guarantee respect for that principle of legitimacy.

It may be premature to make a conclusive assessment of the Kosovo crisis, but it is clear that it has affected and will affect the functioning and credibility of this Organization. Perhaps the only positive element of that conflict is that it has clearly shown that any further delay in reforming the United Nations cannot be allowed or justified. I hope that resolution 53/30, adopted by the General Assembly last December during the current session, on the majority required to make any changes in relation to the Security Council, will facilitate an acceleration of the process of reform.

As for the current worrying situation in East Timor, we must hope that this time United Nations mechanisms will work effectively and an end will be put to the violations of human rights that are taking place in that region.

The results achieved at this session in the sphere of disarmament and arms limitation can be considered encouraging given the context in which the negotiations took place. Among the various resolutions adopted, I should like to highlight the one relating to the convening of an international conference on the illicit trade in weapons in all its aspects, including small arms and light weapons. The entry into force last March of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction is a comforting indication that there is a general aversion to such cruelly indiscriminate weapons.

Peacekeeping operations have received particular attention in the General Assembly during this session. The financing of various such missions was approved, including the complex Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo. Furthermore, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of peacekeeping, the international community paid tribute to this indispensable instrument of peace and to the men and women who have taken part in it and in many cases given their lives in this endeavour.

The year of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was one of great activity for the General Assembly. Among the various resolutions adopted, I should like to highlight the one by which the General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. The adoption of that Declaration after 13 years of negotiation is an important new milestone in the process of consolidating and improving the international system for the protection of human rights.

Above all, through the resolution adopted last December on the Statute of the International Criminal Court, at this session the General Assembly joined in the search for the most effective measures to ensure the international protection of human rights and to bring to justice those who violate them. In that resolution the Assembly recognized the historic importance of the Statute and adopted measures for setting up the Court and setting it under way. That was the best way to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the cornerstone of one of the most inspired and momentous political and institutional creations of the twentieth century.

The second major contradiction to which I should like to refer relates to technological progress, to the revolution in communications and transportation and to the extraordinary expansion of scientific knowledge, which have led humankind to unprecedented levels of material development. But the benefits of this progress are distributed unequally among the various sectors of humanity. This has produced a disturbing split, caused by the fact that the technological explosion is taking place in the developed countries, where a lesser portion of the world's population lives, while elsewhere a demographic explosion is accompanied by an acute technological deficit. As a result, in a world that is increasingly small and interdependent, we have the dangerous coexistence of prosperous and technologically advanced societies with populations living in conditions of poverty and insecurity.

The process of globalization does not, on its own, help resolve this contradiction. On the contrary, it is generally accepted that the rapid acceleration of globalization in recent years, resulting from the opening of markets and the liberalization and modernization of trade, may well heighten social differences and economic contradictions in international society as well as within national societies. If we do not rapidly take effective measures to correct the negative effects of that process, the threats of social disintegration will become increasingly real and disturbing, and the possibility of establishing stability and lasting peace even more remote.

The uncertainty resulting from this process that we are witnessing led to our holding, at the beginning of this session, a high-level discussion on the economic and social impact of globalization and interdependence and their political consequences. On that occasion, it became

clear that there was great interest on the part of Governments, international bodies and civil society in this area. In order to continue to deepen our consideration of this phenomenon, which affects the lives of all present and future inhabitants of the planet, we must adopt rules for clarification and guidance.

In the dynamic context of growing globalization and interdependence, the United Nations is called upon to play a fundamental role as the body promoting cooperation and guidance for development. The General Assembly assumed that responsibility when it adopted the important resolution entitled "Role of the United Nations in promoting development in the context of globalization and interdependence". The question has remained open for analysis and consideration by Governments. It is to be hoped that we will adopt as soon as possible specific measures that will ensure that the benefits of globalization are distributed equally and in particular that we will avoid marginalizing developing countries and reduce their vulnerability.

Of equal importance and closely related to this matter is the resolution on the financial crisis and its impact on growth and development, especially in the developing countries. In this resolution, the Assembly, *inter alia*, has stressed the need to strengthen and improve mechanisms to prevent, manage and solve international financial crises and proposes measures most effectively to address these issues and to mitigate their negative effects on the development prospects of developing countries.

The third and last major contradiction to which I wish to refer arises from the fact that while, in many societies, a high level of social integration has been achieved, with high levels of knowledge, culture and creative activities, those same societies appear nevertheless to be extremely vulnerable to such dangers as drug trafficking, organized crime, terrorism and environmental degradation. It is among the capacities of this Assembly to establish defences against these enemies — the United Nations has indeed been involved in this task — and to carry out a vigorous educational campaign to contribute to developing a culture of health, a culture of legality and a culture of environmental conservation. There is no greater cause of environmental degradation than poverty.

The grave concern of Governments regarding the negative impact that current economic trends may well have on social development has been seen at this session on an ongoing basis. Prompted by this concern, the Assembly has adopted several resolutions on important social issues, among which I would mention those on international cooperation to address the world drug problem, on transnational international crime, the situation of women and the rights of the child and refugees, among others.

I must also highlight the convening of the twenty-first special session of the General Assembly to assess the further implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development. This event was evidence of the democratization and universalization of information and knowledge in this sphere. It reaffirmed the will of the international community to continue to address questions of population and development that are affected by decisions in the spheres of science, culture and tradition, considering all as ineluctable aspects of the same problem. That problem, ultimately, must be solved at the human level with a responsible use of freedom.

Finally, without claiming to have drafted an exhaustive list, I wish to refer to the resolutions on decolonization, cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space, questions related to information — in particular the resolution reaffirming a series of principles and guidelines for international negotiations. I consider of particular importance the resolution on dialogue among civilizations and the resolution by which the Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace was adopted earlier today. Both are cornerstones on which the international community can in the future build an ethical legal system to govern future relations among States and peoples. The ethical content of that commitment is an element which, in my view, is unavoidable.

The Millennium Summit, to be held at the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly to begin in September 2000 — in preparation of which a great deal of work has been done at this fifty-third session — will provide a unique opportunity to consider the role which the United Nations is to play in the new century. In this connection, I am pleased to note that, at this session, intensive negotiations have been held on this issue, thanks to which substantive progress has been made towards determining the format of the meeting and the bases or content of that important event. I have no doubt that, on the basis of this work, the preparations for the Summit will be successfully completed at the fifty-fourth session.

In short, at its fifty-third session, the General Assembly considered a total of 170 items at 107 plenary meetings and nine informal meetings. It adopted 309 resolutions — 248 by consensus — and 130 decisions.

The variety and importance of the questions discussed at this session ending today and the earnest and constructive spirit in which they were considered show that, because of its representativeness, its universality, its capacity to listen and to see things from all angles, the United Nations continues to be the sole and central forum for pursuing global dialogue on the fundamental world problems facing mankind. This is the unshirkable role which we must continue to play in the future of conflicts awaiting us in the new millennium. To do this effectively will depend on two factors.

First, the Organization must have the necessary financial resources to fulfil its commitments. In this regard, it is to be hoped that the major debtor States of this Organization will pay their international financial obligations as soon as possible. Secondly, it will depend on our adopting the necessary reforms to make this institution capable of meeting new challenges and needs. We must step up our efforts to restore the primacy of the Organization in leading international affairs, particularly those affecting peace and security. We must strengthen and improve it, bringing its structure and functioning in line with the requirements of new needs and challenges. This, ultimately, does not depend on one or several us; it depends on each of us, on all of us.

In the General Assembly, in recent years we have noted an effort along these lines that has continued throughout the session ending today. The general process of reform in the United Nations, which was invigorated at the last session, has continued under my presidency. The Assembly has continued to work primarily on the basis of ideas and proposals of the Secretary-General, to whom we reiterate our thanks and recognition for his genuine commitment to the cause of reform. The process of putting these initiatives into practice has been slower than it was at first. However, significant progress was achieved at this session in the sphere of the environment and human settlements through the adoption of a series of important measures and recommendations that will undoubtedly improve the functioning and efficiency of the Organization in this sphere.

If, before assuming my responsibilities as President of this Assembly, I was convinced of the need to change the functioning of the main organs of the United Nations and their interrelationship, today, after a year of experience in this post, I am far more convinced of it than ever. I must confess that, more than once, I was surprised and even perplexed and pained to note that, despite sporadic contacts with their respective representatives, the organs with the major political responsibilities in the Organization — the Security Council and the General Assembly — act in isolation from one another, without coordination or transparency.

Security Council reform is undoubtedly the most controversial element of the United Nations restructuring effort, and the one with the greatest political implications. The ambitious intention to transform the Council into a more representative, more democratic, more open, more transparent, and hence more effective body makes for an extraordinarily complex and delicate task that requires effort and time, enormous patience and firm political will from all participants in the exercise. We can now say that all of us, myself included, have invested great effort in this task and that we have given and received generous demonstrations of patience. But quite frankly, I do not perceive general true political will for reform that would facilitate agreement on the basic matters.

Nonetheless, I am pleased to report that despite continuing deep differences on the fundamental elements of this matter, the Open-ended Working Group on the Question of Equitable Representation on and Increase in the Membership of the Security Council and Other Matters related to the Security Council succeeded in reaching agreement on certain basic, very general, ideas. Unlike earlier reports, the report adopted earlier this morning is not limited to a description of the programme of meetings and of the documents produced — a description necessary from the historical standpoint; it also indicated for the first time in seven years a consensus on some formal and substantive elements which, although modest, could be used in future discussions. Moreover, substantive progress was made on the Council's working methods and on the transparency of its work. I must add that, in addition to the valuable oral statements made in the Working Group, many delegations responded to the Chairman's invitation by setting out their positions in writing; these notes, along with the oral presentations, constitute valuable working material for future meetings of the Working Group.

After 53 long and sometimes tense meetings of the Working Group, these results might well seem very meagre. But, looking at them from the proper perspective and considering the importance of the item and the fact that the vital interests of States are at stake, we can affirm, without making the error of excessive self-esteem or, worse, self-congratulation, that we have achieved limited but significant progress. After all, it is not by great leaps but by small and cautious steps like those

taken at this session that we can cover the greatest distance and avoid the most obstacles. It is important also to note that during the meetings of the Working Group, we finally achieved, not without difficulty, a high level of substantive participation by delegations and of frankness in the expression of their views.

To be sure, resolution 53/30, which requires a two-thirds majority of Members of the General Assembly on any question relating to reform of the Security Council, allayed certain fears and eliminated certain misapprehensions that had had a negative effect on the work of the Group. It undoubtedly provides a solid basis for consolidating the spirit of trust needed to carry out the task of reforming the United Nations.

Let me make a personal comment that I consider to be very important. Suggestions or proposals relating to working methods made by the Chairman were always based firmly on the fundamental principle, accepted from the very outset, of transparency in negotiations. It is to be hoped that mistrust — which at times, happily briefly, was nearly at the level of belligerence — will yield to greater flexibility in our discussions, without this ever implying that we should ignore the extremely high level of sensitivity and political importance involved in reform of the Charter.

It remains for me to convey my deep and sincere thanks to all who accompanied me in the complex and at times arduous task of presiding over the work of the General Assembly. I know full well that I carried out that task well at times, reasonably well at other times, and not so well on occasion. But it was always my intention to perform well. I wish to acknowledge in particular the Vice-Presidents, especially those who were always ready to take the Chair when my presence was required elsewhere, including in my own country, whose Ministry of Foreign Affairs I continued to head. My thanks go also to the Chairmen, Vice-Chairmen and Rapporteurs of the Main Committees, to the coordinators of the various consultations and negotiations, and to the two Vice-Chairmen who worked with me in guiding the Open-ended Working Group on Security Council reform.

As usual, the Secretariat fulfilled its responsibilities with the effectiveness to which Member States are accustomed. I wish publicly to thank the Secretary-General and the staff of the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services, and the interpreters, translators, conference officers and security officers. The help I received from all who worked with me was even more valuable since throughout the year I continued to fulfil my responsibilities as Minister for Foreign Affairs of Uruguay, which is a member of the Latin American Integration Association and of the Southern Cone Common Market, as well as an active negotiator within the Free Trade Area of the Americas; all of these are responsibilities of the highest order for my country and for my region. Believe me when I say that I devoted maximal time and energy to respond properly to the trust placed in me a year ago by my regional group, the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States, to which my country is honoured to belong, and by all other members, by which I was highly honoured. I hope I did not let them down, but that is but a hope.

As I leave you — representatives, colleagues, Secretariat staff — I want to express my sincerest wishes for the success of the next President.

Agenda item 2 (*continued*)

Minute of silent prayer or meditation

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I invite representatives to stand and observe a minute of silent prayer or meditation.

The members of the General Assembly observed a minute of silent prayer or meditation.

Closure of the fifty-third session

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I declare closed the fifty-third session of the General Assembly.

The meeting rose at 12.10 p.m.